

Middletown School Readiness Council
12:00 P.M. - 1:30 P.M.
Wednesday, February 17, 2016
Wilbert Snow School
299 Wadsworth St.
Middletown, CT 06457

Members Present: Alice Torres, Ed Bonilla, Jessica Stewart, Sheila Daniels, Wendy Berlind, Kitty Robinson, Amy Waterman, Beverly Lawrence, Jim Gaudreau, Susan Sienkiewicz, Jennifer Cannata, Izzi Greenberg, Pat Charles, Marla Hinz, Jerome Long, Donna Marino and Tina Gomes.

I. Welcome & Call to Order: Ed Bonilla opened the meeting at 12:13P.M., welcoming everyone. Introductions were made.

II. Acceptance of the January 20, 2016 School Readiness Council meeting minutes: Wendy Berlind moved to accept the minutes from the above mentioned date. Jen Cannata seconded and the motion carried unanimously.

III. Coordinator's Report:

Financial and Monthly Summary Report: Jessica circulated the current report which reflected that all slots were filled for the January reporting period. Nine (9) new full day slots were awarded to Middletown as of January 1, 2016; 5 at Town & Country and 4 at Bright & Early, all have been filled. Enrollment of non-residents is at 12, well below the set limit of 28.

Legislative Update: As noted at our last meeting, Jessica reiterated the cuts expected in the state budget. She, Izzi, Donna, Lina and an Even Start graduate testified last evening to the Appropriations Committee regarding early childhood and family issues. A brief discussion followed. When asked what she spoke to, Jessica noted the budget cuts to early childhood and opposition to the block grant approach to this budget session. It was further noted that Even Start has been totally cut from the budget. Pat noted it was discussed at the Governor's visit to City Hall last evening. He didn't have all the details, but noted he would look into it. Funds are being shifted from one program to another without additional monies being allocated. Both Jessica and Donna noted Library support was prevalent at last evening's hearing. Alice asked if we as a council, wanted to support Even Start. Jessica suggested Sen. Beth Bye and Representative Walker would be good contacts to send a letter of support to around Even Start. Jessica noted if the budget package returns to a line item approach, she is hopeful Even Start will not be cut. Jessica asked Alice to create a letter on behalf of the Council. Jerome suggested letters from community members be sent in addition to one from the Council. Pat noted community members were present at the City Hall meeting.

Jessica announced April 13th will be designated as Advocacy Day for Local Early Childhood Councils (LECC), which approximately 80 across CT. This would be a day for LECC's to share how their community work impacts children and families within their communities. Izzi Greenberg motioned for Jessica to send a letter, drafted by the co-chairs, on the Council's behalf to the necessary parties in support of Even Start. Wendy Berlind seconded. The motion passed

unanimously. A brief discussion around the importance of a second generational learning model followed.

Goals Draft: Jessica distributed the draft of the Council goals to members present, noting these goals were taken from discussions held at the past two meetings along with action steps serving merely as suggestions. This draft was developed as a conversation starter.

Goal I: Increase community engagement/understanding of the work of the SRC

Jerome asked if funds are needed to conduct this work. Jessica replied yes for some, while others don't cost anything, or are a minimal cost, or can be covered by other entities. A suggestion of a presentation to the Common Council similar to the recent BOE presentation was made.

Discussion around hosting a meet and greet with the providers and parents followed. We might have to pilot the meet and greet to see if it is a viable concept. Additionally, it was suggested that we hold the event at night and invite parents to bring children and have an activity for the children. A kindergarten transition focus in the spring was suggested by the providers council.

The providers also suggested family events could lend themselves as a way for council members to become familiar with the programs. The directors did share they are not in favor of council members attending their Parent Advisory Board meetings, but would like to set up annual Kindergarten Transition events and invite both council members and school principals.

In Monica's absence, Izzi shared her views noting we need to know our roles and the by-laws, and she asked what are we trying to promote, high quality early childhood education or our council. Izzi noted the same concerns. Jessica noted Goal II supports that very issue. We need to understand our roles and figure out how to get out the word that we exist. She explained that when she presented to the Board of Education, even they didn't understand the work of the School Readiness Council.

Alice noted do we need to understand our roles before attempting Goal I. Alice went back to the statute which she brought with her to share with the Council. She asked what does that mean for Middletown? Jessica noted information in our earlier plan. Izzi noted we may use the Youth Services Board approach to market ourselves, using a newsletter, monthly blurb of what we are doing and what's going on at programs. Do we want to consider a Facebook page? Do people understand our School Readiness title on the Middletown Public Schools website? The assumption is probably not. Jim suggested creating a committee to work on that.

Where to go from here? Do we want to combine the meet and greet with the Advocacy work? This combination of events provides a reason to bring providers, parents and Council members together. A subcommittee to work on this will be created including: Beverly, Donna and Izzi. Donna suggested community messengers would be a good way to spread the message, and Alice noted non-Council community members may be included. Jim would like to help with kindergarten transition for providers. Pat asked Tina if Jessica could present to the Common Council, and Tina suggested the June meeting.

Roles: how would we like to proceed? Go back through original goals and move through to developing new goals. Jessica can go through the community plan. March meeting will be around this work. Best practices for Council business is in our by-laws. How we vote, majority of people at the table. Outcomes to goals? Jessica is working on it developing a measure of outcomes for our goals and one might be comparing the kindergarten dial scores for preschool

experienced children vs children with no preschool experience. Behavioral measures have been focus as of late. Alice noted as we are thinking forward, she wonders if we would we like to have Wesleyan University look into take this on as a research project. We might also consider anecdotal parent experiences and input from kindergarten teachers asking what a class looks like with a high percentage of preschool experiences vs none. Jessica asked for any feedback on the draft and stated she will compile the information to share at a later date.

V. Adjournment: Ed closed the meeting at 1:36P.M., thanking those present for their attendance.

**The next Middletown School Readiness Council meeting will be held on
Wednesday, March 16, 2016
at
Wilbert Snow School
299 Wadsworth St., Middletown, CT 06457
from
12:00 P.M. to 1:30 P.M.**

Respectfully Submitted by:
Sheila C. Daniels